Angels
and the purposes of God
DiscipleGuide
CHRISTIAN LIVING

# Angels
## and the purposes of God

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**The Christian Living Track of the Christian Growth Ministry**

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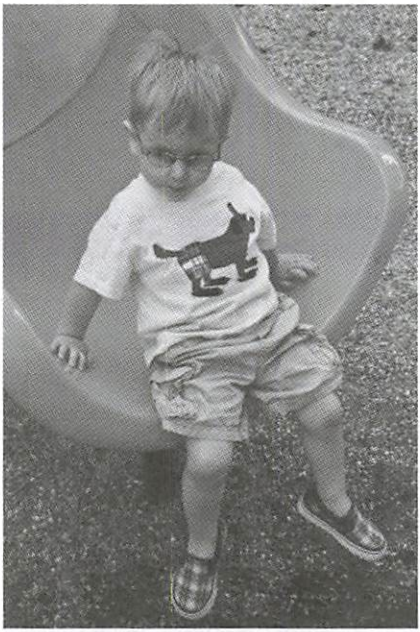
# Introduction

Perhaps no person did so much to open our understanding to the relevance and the ministry of angels as did the late Dr. Wassell Burgess. In a message entitled "Divine Mystery" he chose as his text 1 Timothy 3:16: *"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory."* He reminded us of the six declarations of Paul to Timothy as he sought to enlighten and encourage the young and disillusioned preacher:

- That God was manifest in the flesh
- That He was justified in the Spirit
- That He was seen of angels
- That He was preached to the Gentiles
- That He was believed on in the world
- That He was received up into glory.

The passages that we will examine in this series of lessons will remind us that God is as active in the world today as He was in the world of the past.

We will be reminded that without the active involvement of God in the life of believers we would



be overcome by our spiritual adversaries.

We will be reminded of the help that is available to us through our faith in the Savior.

We will be confronted by the reality that God's creation is larger than we are.

And we will be encouraged by the fact that God's purposes in the world will be accomplished.

We are seldom directly aware of presence of God's angels or even what they are doing in time. Yet since their creation they have been a part of God's hand at work in this world and the world to come.

*Keith Lunceford, author*

LESSON 1

# That Other World

## Genesis 28:11-17

Jacob cried out, *"How dreadful is this place! This is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."* In the Canaanite language the place was called Luz. But Jacob, in response to the vision he had seen, renamed the place *Bethel* meaning "the House of God."

Jacob had entered into a plot with the help of his mother to steal the family birthright from his twin brother, Esau. Esau was a man of the world, a man of the woods. He lacked, on the other hand, any real interest in the faith of his fathers. Since there was a strong spiritual component involved in the family birthright, both Jacob and Rebekah excused their deceitfulness by deciding that Jacob would be more worthy and appreciative of the family's spiritual birthright. Soon their deceitfulness was discovered, and Isaac sent Jacob away to the land of Rebekah's nativity, to his uncle Laban's home.

Jacob was the consummate momma's boy who was more comfortable clinging to his mother's apron than he was to roaming the countryside. It is hardly a surprise that his sleep was interrupted by fitful dreams. If his dreams had been nightmares filled with terrifying sights and sounds we would not be surprised. But the God Who loved Jacob provided a spectacular vision which encouraged and emboldened his timid servant. It came in the form of a ladder which reached from the

### The Heart of the Lesson

God is at work bringing to pass His purposes in this world. Trust God knowing that He is pleased to use both the holy angels and obedient people to accomplish His purposes.

earth to heaven. And as the Bible so beautifully adds, *"behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it"* (verse 12).

But this was more than a dream. It was a vision that Jacob described as *"the gate of heaven."* God pulled back the veil that separates this world from another world, a world of spirits and spiritual things. Jacob saw a small segment of that other world, which included a vision of angels. This image was meant to encourage Jacob and to inform Jacob that he had been included in the plans and purposes of God.

## This World

The world we live in is a material, physical world. God has given us a variety of senses that enable us to function within the dimensions of this world. We have sight enough to observe the physical elements of this world. We have hearing enough to hear the sounds of this world both pleasant and unpleasant. We have touch enough to feel our way along in this world. We have smell enough to be attracted to the sweet odors of this world and to be repulsed by odors that warn us of danger. And we have taste enough to attract us to foods which are necessary to sustain life. We have enough of all of these senses to sustain our lives and to help us function in this world. When we add our marvelous mental capacity to these senses, we realize that we live in a vehicle that has been created for our use in this world.

Even with our combined senses and intellectual capabilities we live in a world with boundaries, walls, and limitations beyond which we cannot go. We are bound by the length of our days, the frailty of human flesh, and our own sin nature.

## That Other World

Listen to Jacob's conclusion in verse 16: *"And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not."* There is another world all around us. It is right next to us and it is as real as this world. We cannot ordinarily comprehend its existence with the limits of our humanity. Occasionally humans actually catch a glimpse of that other world under the most unusual and trying of circumstances.

Jesus once said, *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them"* (Matthew 18:20). Now you can't see Him, but He is with us. At times, although we cannot see Him or hear Him, we can still sense His presence with us. That is because that other world, the world He occupies, is right next to us. But there is a veil that separates our world from that world.

Hear Jacob again. *"How dreadful is this place! This is none other*

*but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."* In the night and in the midst of his uncertain future God pulled back the veil that separates this world from that world for Jacob's benefit. That other world is all around us. That can be an encouraging reality. It can also be a troubling fact for those who have rejected the Savior.

## The Inhabitants of That Other World

The Bible reveals that this other world is a busy place filled with a vast population. Most importantly God is there. Jesus is there by the right hand of the Father. We know that for when the godly deacon, Stephen, was about to die at the hands of his murderers the Bible says: *"But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up stedfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God"* (Acts 7:55). In that same world dwell the spirits of all the departed saints of all the ages past. *"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses"* (Hebrews 12:1). His holy angels are witnesses to our struggle of faith. All of these witnesses live in that other world but have a clear view of this world.

Satan and his legions of demons live in that world of spirits beyond this world. Jude wrote dramatically about *"the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day"* (verse 6). While those mighty but fallen angels are safely locked away until the judgment day, the devil and legions of demons occupy that world beyond ours. They have the power to move freely between the two worlds and have wrought great harm through the ages.

But, thank God, His holy and faithful angels are also there. *"Elisha prayed, and said, Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha"* (2 Kings 6:17).

God is surely at work in our world. He is opposed by Satan and his legions. But His purposes will not fail for He is God and possesses the powers of the Almighty. He is also aided by a host of faithful and holy angels as He moves as a sovereign ruler in His creation. His plans and purposes will not be thwarted. Victory is assured. And we can participate in His victories by our faith and faithfulness to His purposes.

LESSON 2

# I Believe in Angels

## Colossians 1:12-17

Paul wrote the book of Colossians to combat an ancient heresy that had crept into the church at Colosse. False teachers were attempting to introduce their mystery concepts into the church. Paul was bold and blunt in exposing the fallacies of the Gnostic heresy. That doctrine attempted to substitute a doctrine of works in place of the doctrine of salvation by grace. Gnostics taught that Jesus was an emanation from God in the form of an angel. They denied His deity. Modern cults have copied this philosophy. Perhaps best known is the philosophy of the Mormon cult which identifies Jesus as a brother to Satan, hence an angel.

While forbidding the Colossian saints from embracing the worship of angels, Paul reveals vital information about these marvelous creatures. He helped ancient and modern saints gain a proper perspective of the existence, purpose, and ministry of angels.

## Angels Are Real

Within the framework of Judaism the Pharisees were the great, spiritual athletes of their day. They were orthodox, stern, and austere in their persuasions. In the end they became Jesus' bitter enemies for His doctrine conflicted with theirs. Interestingly Jesus and the Pharisees agreed that angels are real.

The Sadducees constituted the political power within Israel. They controlled the office of High Priest, the Sanhedrin Court, the mone-

**The Heart of the Lesson**

God created a host of angels to participate in the pursuit of His purposes. Believers should always remember that Christ is supreme in His creation.

tary exchange in the temple, and the sale of animals which were used for sacrifices. They were secular, practical, and worldly. They disagreed with Christ doctrinally in the matter of angels for they denied the existence of angels altogether.

In refuting the Gnostic heresy Paul emphasized the existence of angels. In Colossians 1:16 he mentioned the visible and invisible worlds, *"Whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers."* This phrase is used in the New Testament to identify the angelic world, both the holy angels and the fallen angels. The phrase emphasizes that there is order in the angelic world. It is an amazing world about which we have only partial knowledge.

You will find similar terminology in Ephesians 6:12: *"For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."* This language clearly refers to fallen angels and their demonic influence in the world. Still the primary emphasis in both instances is upon the reality of angelic activity. God's holy angels are at work doing the bidding of the Father in heaven as He works to bring about His purposes.

Still we must recognize that a host of fallen angels are at work. The reality of satanic activity in this world is recorded on the front pages of newspapers and is the subject of the headlines of television news broadcasts. The depths of wickedness and evil can only be explained by the reality of demonic activity all around us. Angels, both holy and fallen, are real.

## Angels Are Created

Paul's real interest in both Colossians and Ephesians was to emphasize the supremacy of Christ over the angelic world. The tendency on the part of the Colossians to worship angels was a tragic mistake on their part. The worship of angels meant that they were worshipping the lesser rather than the greater.

Christ did for them what no other could do. Paul identified Christ as the second person of the Trinity by saying, *"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature"* (Colossians 1:15). In other words, Christ was what no other could be. Finally he described Jesus in this fashion: *"For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist"* (Colossians 1:16, 17). In other words, He accomplished what no other could accomplish.

The great fallacy involved in the worship of angels is bound up in the fact that they are created beings, not self-existent as is our Sav-

ior. To worship them was to worship the creature instead of the Creator.

Angels are marvelous, fascinating, and powerful creatures. Yet at their best they are just Another's handiwork. We may admire them and appreciate them. Still we are never to worship them.

## Angels Are Encountered

Have you ever gone into a dark room and had the hair on your neck stand up as you seemed to feel the presence of someone else in the room? When you turned on the light, you discovered that there was no one there, at least no one that could be seen?

Have you ever awakened in the night startled, feeling the presence of evil close by? It was not a nightmare. It was something different, more frightening, something devilish and demonic?

Have you ever seen an unexplained or shadowy figure that you could not rationally explain?

Perhaps the answers to these and other similar questions find their solution in the fact that there are at least three hundred specific instances recorded in the Bible where people encountered angels for a variety of reasons. Hebrews 13:2 reveals, *"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares."* Through the ages the saints have had encounters with angels.

One of the most revealing occurred in the service of Zacharias, the father of John the Baptist, as he ministered as a priest in the temple. *"And there appeared unto him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense"* (Luke 1:11). The angel says, *"I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings"* (Luke 1:19).

At the empty tomb of Jesus, Mary Magdalene was said to have looked inside the grave. *"And seeth two angels in white sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou?"* (John 20:12-13). Again those angels were visible. They possessed tangible, physical forms. They were in form like men. They could speak, and they could respond when spoken to.

When John was transported from earth to heaven he said, *"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands"* (Revelation 5:11).

Yes, I believe in angels. But more than that I believe in Jesus for it is everlastingly true: *"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"* (John 3:16).

LESSON 3

# The Nature of Angels

**Hebrews 1:14**

The Greek word *angeloi* and Hebrew word *malekim* both mean "messenger." Both words are sometimes translated *angel.* Sometimes the Bible uses these words to refer to God's human messengers (Haggai 1; Malachi 2-3; Revelation 3). In most cases, however, the words refer to the celestial hosts of heaven, the angels of God that look upon the face of God and serve Him day and night.

## Divided

Psalm 104 refers to the creation of the angels: *"Who maketh his angels spirits: his ministers a flaming fire"* (verse 4). In reference to Satan, Ezekiel writes: *"Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created, till iniquity was found in thee"* (Ezekiel 28:15). Satan was an angel created in holiness to serve the Almighty. When God created the angels, He did it perfectly as He does all things. He did not create some to be holy and some to be evil. They were all perfect in the day that they were created.

But like us, they were given the freedom of choice. They were free moral agents who had the right to choose their destiny. Some of them chose to rebel. They chose to forsake righteousness and obedience.

### The Heart of the Lesson

The celestial hosts continually serve God. Believers should dedicate themselves to that same task.

The angels that chose to worship God and to be true to God were confirmed in that character forever. They are the holy and elect angels. It is also true that those angels that chose to follow Satan were confirmed forever in that character.

The world of angels is a divided, competing world. There are holy angels faithful and true to the Word, the will, and the purposes of God. But there are fallen angels that are wicked, sinister, and hindrances to the purposes of God.

## Structured

A hierarchy within the angelic world has apparently existed from the beginning. Ezekiel 28 sheds light on this facet of the world of angels. In verses 12-19 the prophet describes a personality as the *"king of Tyrus."* Even a cursory reading of the text leads us to understand that no king of this world could be described in such a fashion. This is nothing less than a description of Satan, the arch enemy of God. *"Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou has walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire"* (verse 14). The terminology of this verse suggests power and authority.

In verse 12 Ezekiel had indicated that this individual possessed *"the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty."* All of this language suggests to us that Satan was at the top of the angelic hierarchy that served God prior to the rebellion of those angels (Jude 6).

In Jude 9 we read of another mighty angel, Michael. He is called an *archangelos*, "the archangel." The Greek word *archon* means "chief." In Daniel 10:13-14 an angel confesses that he had been sent to bring a message to Daniel but had been hindered in that assignment. Again the language is indicative of an angelic hierarchy.

Michael is always depicted as the great champion of the nation of Israel. In Revelation 12 it is Michael and his subordinate angels that will cast Satan and his legions from the heavens. It was Michael who contended with Satan over the body of Moses.

Then there is Gabriel. He is always the messenger of God. In all likelihood it was Gabriel that had been dispatched from heaven with the message for Daniel. The Bible names Gabriel four times, and it is always in the capacity of a messenger. In Daniel 8:16 and 9:21 he shares with the prophet visions of end time events. Gabriel announced to Zechariah the birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:19). Gabriel announced to Mary that she was to be the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:26-33). Although not named it is probable that it was Gabriel that appeared to Joseph in a dream (Matthew 1:20).

An arch is an architectural structure formed from three points, one at the top and two on either side to form a base. Apparently in the

beginning of the angelic world, God had established an arch of authority and power in that world with Satan (Lucifer) at the top and Michael and Gabriel on either side of the base. Hence we refer to them as archangels. That original hierarchy was interrupted by the rebellion of Satan which is described and documented in Ezekiel 28:12-19.

In Genesis 3:24 the cherubim guarded the tree of life with flaming swords. In the tabernacle and the temple the cherubim were depicted on the veil which separated the holy place from the holy of holies, which contained the ark of the covenant. Golden cherubim with wings outstretched were molded on either side of the lid, the mercy seat, of the ark. In Psalm 80:1 we read of God *"that dwellest between the cherubims."* In the temple there were carved cherubim on the walls of the building. They appear in Ezekiel 9:3 and 10:1 where they are identified as the living creatures which are described in Ezekiel 1:5-24.

The seraphim are mentioned in Isaiah 6:2-3. Isaiah saw them hovering about the throne of the Almighty in that marvelous vision from God which resulted in his conversion and call into the prophetic ministry. Their name means "burning ones," and they are associated with the holiness of God (verse 3).

In Revelation 5:11 John writes: *"And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne."* Then he attempts to number them saying, *"And the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands."* These marvelous creatures are all employed in the service of God working day and night tirelessly occupied in preserving and bringing to pass the purposes of God. They are ministering spirits (Hebrews 1:14). Some of them are our guardians (Acts 12:8-11 and Psalm 34:7). Some have served as strengthening and comforting spirits (Luke 22:43; 1 Kings 19:5).

Some are watching angels (1 Timothy 3:16). Some are destroying angels as those who entered Sodom and Gomorrah in the days of Abraham and Lot. Some have gone to war for God as that angel in the days of Hezekiah in 2 Kings 19:35.

Some will be employed as reaping angels when the Lord shall come. They will separate the sheep from the goats, the lost from the saved. They will reap the fields which are already ripe unto harvest.

Always and in every way God's holy angels are at work bringing to pass His purposes. As believers you and I have a part to play in the fulfillment of the plan of God. And certainly, the holy angels of God are at work. It is as one of them said to John as he fell at his feet to worship him, *"See thou do it not: for I am thy fellowservant"* (Revelation 22:9).

LESSON 4

# Getting to Know God's Ministering Spirits

## Genesis 1:1; Job 38:1-7

In the 1960s there was a general emphasis in America upon everything scientific. That era produced the notion that God was dead. Science would replace the need for a God to explain the unexplainable.

In 1973 the release of *The Exorcist* reintroduced Americans to the supernatural. The movie dealt with demon possession. A morbid and sad interest in the occult began to resurface across the country. Interestingly enough the world's fascination with the occult and supernatural forced the churches to refocus on these issues. If the world was to become fixated on the subject of demons, the church's answer was to take a fresh look at angels.

Then in the 1990s we started seeing television programs, magazine articles, and a few books emerge which dealt with the existence of angels. "Touched by an Angel" and "Providence" were the best known television programs dealing with the existence and activity of angels. Both presented a depiction of angels which, although touching and entertaining, was neither realistic nor biblical.

New Age proponents were not to be outdone. The New Age concepts on the subject leave us confused for they don't express much difference between their concept of angels and demons. Modern Christians

### The Heart of the Lesson

God's purposes are equal to His powers and abilities. The saints of God, aided and watched by the holy angels, are simply servants of God who should respond to His will in a positive manner.

need to remember in the midst of all of this confusion what Paul wrote. *"For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works"* (2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

## The Involvement of Angels in the Creation

Genesis 1:1 is unique in all of literature. *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth."* This verse refers to the creation of the physical universe as we know it and are able to observe it. That declaration also refers to the heaven of this physical universe. In the Bible we have references to three heavens: the first is the atmosphere around the earth; the second is the infinite universe of stars, planets, moons, and solar systems; the third is the heaven of God's spiritual world, the world in which God dwells. When saints die, we say that they have gone to heaven. That is the third heaven. When the heaven and the earth of Genesis 1:1 were created, the third heaven was already in existence. This third heaven was the habitat of God and His angels.

In that world the angels were already a reality at the time of the creation of the heaven and the earth. In Job 38:1-7 God discusses in blunt terms the creation of Genesis 1:1 with his servant. Job had asked God *why*. He wanted to know *why* all of things that had happened to him had occurred. God responded with *where.* Essentially God said, Where were you *"when the morning stars* (another term for angels) *sang together, and all the sons of God* (another term for angels) *shouted for joy?"* (Job 38:7). They were singing and shouting at the splendor of God's creative handiwork.

Now when the creation of the angels transpired we cannot know. How many eons of time had passed with the Trinity living within that mysterious spiritual world alone with the angels cannot be determined. All we know for certain is that the angels were there watching in awe as one of the purposes of God was brought to pass. And in time you and I will learn that we do not always understand God's purposes. All we can really do is to stand in awe and reverence of His handiwork.

## Why the Angels Were Created

Much about angels for now must remain a mystery to earthbound saints. But one thing is abundantly clear — they were created to be the servants of God and man. In Psalm 8:5 David tells us that human beings were created *"a little lower than the angels."* We are a lower order in powers and abilities. When God created angels He

endowed them with powers and abilities which He did not give to us. Many of those powers are awesome in their scope and potential. Perhaps the greatest power that they possess from a human viewpoint is their ability to move from the spirit world into this physical world at will or at least upon God's command. This ability was given to the angels as a part of their relationship to and responsibilities for those who are called the *"heirs of salvation"* (Hebrews 1:14).

Their overall powers are many and varied. One awesome example of their potential powers was put on display during the days of Hezekiah, the king of Judah. His kingdom had been invaded by the Assyrians under their king, Sennacherib. With the situation looking all but hopeless for Judah, Hezekiah sought the advice of the prophet Isaiah. Isaiah instructed the king to pray. It is interesting to note he began his prayer, *"O LORD God of Israel, which dwellest between the cherubims"* (2 Kings 19:15).

God sent His angel to come to the aid of His frantic nation. But He only sent one mighty angel. *"The angel of the LORD went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses"* (2 Kings 19:35). The devastation wrought by that one angel translated into 185,000 dead Assyrian soldiers. When we think about angels, we are talking about beings which have been granted awesome and fearful powers sufficient to bring to pass the purposes for which God dispatches them.

Regarding God's holy angels we are to be warned. First, we must not try to create or reshape them into something born of our own imaginations. They are not docile, loving, compassionate creatures. They do not express the range of human emotions. They have amazing abilities to bring to pass great good or great destruction depending upon the assignment they have received from God. They do not hesitate to do God's bidding. They are not spiritually progressed human beings. None of their number is a cupid. They are always referred to as being masculine in gender.

Second, we must never let a fascination with angels replace our faith in the Lord Jesus in our lives. Angels are not God, and not one of them ever died on the cross for the sins of humanity.

Third, we must never under any circumstance worship angels. They are our fellow servants. That is how an angel explained himself to John in the Revelation. As we think about how angels are connected to the fulfillment of God's purposes, we are to think more of the One Who created them and Whom they serve with joy and gladness.

LESSON 5

# Angels and the Mysteries of the Creation

**Genesis 1:1-2; 3:22-24**

Whenever we presume to speak about the things of God we need to walk softly and tread lightly. There are mysteries involved in the things God has done that reach far beyond the puny abilities and comprehension of even the greatest minds. The Bible tells us what we need to know in order to make an informed decision about matters of faith. But we are not to imagine for a minute that we have all the answers. In fact, we hardly know the questions!

## God's Creation

We could spend a lifetime in an attempt to uncover all the mysteries that are posed by Genesis 1:1-2: *"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."* Nothing is said in those verses which enables us to fix the date of this creation. Nothing is said about how God accomplished this original creation. Nothing is said about whether this creation was immediate or whether there was a process of creation that took ages to complete, which some scholars have suggested. Nothing is said about whether or not life of some order was a part of that original creation of verse 1.

### The Heart of the Lesson

Angels were witnesses to and involved in the creation of the earth. Believers should live in absolute awe, respect, and reverence before the Creator.

Science and the Bible seem to conflict in the matter of origins. This dispute has often been bitter and divisive. Let us reaffirm our persuasion that where science and the Bible disagree, we will believe the Bible. It may well be that a better understanding of exactly what the Bible says will bring science and the Bible closer together. Regardless, let God be true and every man a liar.

## God's Perfection

On the basis of everything else that we see God do in the Bible we can assume that this original creation of Genesis 1:1 was a perfect creation worthy of the handiwork of the Almighty. We don't see God do things halfway.

When Isaiah looked at the world he said, *"For thus saith the* LORD *that created the heavens; God himself that formed the earth and made it; he hath established it, he created it not in vain, he formed it to be inhabited"* (Isaiah 45:18). We have reasons to believe that the creation of Genesis 1:1 was like that. It was a perfect work worthy of the handiwork of the Almighty which could well have been teeming with life in abundance.

But how do we explain verse 2? *"And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep."* That has the sound of an imperfect, partial, and gradual creation. And worse than that, God's creation was shrouded in darkness when we all know that God hates darkness. How are we to understand this? What is the solution to the mysteries here?

## God's Re-Creation

The solution to these mysteries is found in the Hebrew verb translated *was* in verse 2. That word rightly can have a number of different translations with the immediate text determining how it is to be translated. The word can also be rendered as *became* or *had become*. Therefore the verse could read, "And the earth had become without form, and void."

Jeremiah by inspiration looked back at the creation and wrote, *"I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was without form, and void; and the heavens, and they had no light...I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful place was* [had become] *a wilderness"* (Jeremiah 4:23-26). All of this suggests several things. 1. The earth in its original creation might not have been barren and empty. 2. The earth in its original creation could have had a definite form, just as it does today. 3. The earth could have been inhabited by some forms of life probably far different from what we discover today. 4. The earth might not have been shrouded in darkness in its original creation.

Could it be that the creation of Genesis 1:1 was complete and per-

fect? Could it be that something happened which was dramatic and cataclysmic which marred and ruined that original creation? If that was so, then do we have any suggestion as to an event of such a magnitude which would have been sufficient to cause such a global catastrophe?

Look to Isaiah 14:12 where the prophet asked, *"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground?"* Then he continued in verses 16 and 17, *"They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, and did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?"*

Perhaps the solution to this mystery is solved by the fall of Satan. Now there are plenty of puzzles left. But the fall of Satan when God said, *"I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God ... I will cast thee to the ground"* (Ezekiel 28:16-17), was a cataclysmic event sufficient to have altered the form of the earth and anything that lived on the earth.

While we cannot solve all the mysteries of Genesis 1:1-2 with this explanation, it is plausible that an angel, a fallen angel who engineered the fall of man, was somehow involved in the marring of God's original creation. And this explains why, in the end, Satan will have to be bound and cast into hell. He could never be allowed to roam free for he would attempt to mar and ruin God's new heaven and new earth just as he did the old.

It should not surprise us that a fallen angel had an impact upon God's creation. And we rejoice to know that the holy angels of God were there watching and rejoicing at what they saw God do.

Job 38 is in part God's answer to Job's question *why*. God answered with *where*. Where were you when I did all that I have done? In Job 38 God is talking about the splendors of His handiwork. He tells Job that the *"morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy."* Those were God's faithful angels. As they watched God bring His purposes in creation to pass, they rejoiced.

Further, this makes us admire Jesus all the more. He redeemed the original creation. He has provided a perfect redemption for us. He defeated Satan in the wilderness temptations. And one day He will bind Satan hand and foot and cast him into hell. All of this is going to turn out all right after all. It is just going to take a little while. So keep your eyes on the Lord. Stay in touch with Him in prayer. Obey His will, and it will all work out all right one day.

LESSON 6

# Angels and the Fall of Man

## Genesis 3

While this is a study of angels, it is also more than that. The existence, the work, and ministry of angels are woven into the fabric of human history in ways that are revealed to us in the Scripture. The activities of angels are also woven into the fabric of man's history in ways yet unrevealed. If we were personally aware of the spiritual battles which are being waged all around us, it would frighten us into surrender! Yet some things are revealed for our benefit and understanding.

As we continue this series we need to review how Satan engineered and participated in the Fall. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, by an act of their own volition, surrendered to the temptations of Satan and fell. And when they fell, they did not fall upward. Adam started off better than he ended up.

## The Fall and Human History

An unholy angel engineered the fall of man with all of the cleverness that we would expect from the devil. The revelations of Genesis 3 are vindicated by the great facts of human history and experience.

### The Heart of the Lesson

Human beings are a dichotomy of good and evil — the nature of God and the drag of the flesh. The closer relationship we have to God the more often that we can overcome the drag of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

**Human Experience.** Examine the reports of our police courts, study life, and then ask, "How is it that humanity, the crown of God's creation designed to be Creation's leader and keeper, has sunk morally to a level lower than the animals?"

The thin layer of apparent civilization in our society does not hide the painful fact that no beast of the field will callously abandon its young, much less destroy its own offspring in the womb. The human family is guilty of both of those crimes in terms which can only be described as genocide.

No animal will knowingly drink foul and poisoned water, or ingest drugs which it knows may lead to its demise.

No beast of the field is known to kill indiscriminately just for the thrill of causing death. They kill in defense of family, and home, and for food. Only human beings will kill for the thrill.

No beast of the field will participate in deviant sexual practices. The human family is routinely guilty in this matter.

How is it that in so many respects, human beings have fallen lower than the level of the beasts of the field? The answer is found in the fall of man, engineered and designed by an equally fallen angel.

**The Discord Found in Human Nature.** Two principles and forces are clearly at work in human nature everywhere. One moment he does that which, on the surface, is noble and praiseworthy, but the next he performs that which is vile and base. In some things he seems closely akin to God. In other ways he is clearly the child of the devil. Where does this conflict between good and evil originate? The answer is found in Genesis 3. On the one hand man is the offspring of God; but in other ways he is clearly the child of the devil.

**The Universality of Sin.** Why is it that the king's son in the palace and the saint's daughter in a simple cottage, in spite of every safeguard that love and watchfulness can devise, manifest an unmistakable bias to sin? Why are all people sinful? Genesis 3 has the answer. We inherit the nature of our parents; hence in Adam all die.

**The Universality of Death.** Why is it that everyone will eventually die? We were created by an eternal God and given eternal souls. Why should there be such things as aging, decay, disease, and then death? Science observes and comments about all of these things, but has no explanations for the universality of death. Only Genesis 3 has the solution for the origin of these things.

**The Universal Stagnation of Humanity.** Human life is not progressing, nor growing. Our toys and technology have improved, but life has not progressed. The last book in the Bible was completed two thousand years ago. Where is there a book written since that rivals the books of Job, the Psalms, or the Proverbs? We are still trying to figure out how the Egyptians built the pyramids. We are still marveling at the art of the Greeks, and the government of the Romans. The

great classics of English literature were written a thousand years ago. The human family is all but stagnant and stale in its moral, spiritual, and intellectual growth. And the rule is this: In life, if it is not growing, then it is dying.

## A Path to Destruction

Genesis 3 tragically ends in this fashion, *"So he* [God] *drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."* Isn't it interesting that the Middle East, which was the location of the ancient garden of Eden, is today largely desert? Could it be that the flaming sword resulted in Eden being turned into a wasteland? All we know for certain is what once was the most beautiful garden imaginable was turned into a desert. The destruction of Eden left our first parents to face the harsh realities of a strange and difficult new world. And they soon became parents to two sons, Cain and Abel.

These boys inherited the tendencies and the natures of their parents. The old Indian who once said that he had two dogs fighting within himself had it right. He was asked, "Which one wins?" He answered, "The one I feed the most." That happened in the case of Cain and Abel. Abel was committed to obeying the word of the Lord. Cain was committed to sin and rebellion. As you remember the story, Cain eventually murdered Abel.

God responded to the murder of Abel in this way. *"Now art thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand; When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength; a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him"* (Genesis 4:11-12, 15). God sentenced Cain to a life in a prison of God's making. Lest some soul should attempt to put Cain out of his misery by killing him, God set some kind of mark upon him to warn others to let him alone in his misery.

Behind all of these scenes of agony lurked Satan. There is no direct reference to the devil in Genesis 4. However, what this fallen angel had set in motion in Genesis 3 was working just as he had hoped. The godly son, Abel, had been destroyed, leaving only the ungodly son, Cain, to multiply his rebellious tendencies in the earth. Cain's children would tend to inherit the tendencies of their father. That is just what happened.

Satan had a plan to thwart the plan and purpose of God. He understood Genesis 3:15 in a way that perhaps even Adam and Eve did not. God had said: *"And I will put enmity between thee* [Satan] *and the woman, and between thy seed* [offspring] *and her seed; it shall*

*bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."* God's reference to the seed of the woman is the first specific prophecy in the Bible regarding the coming to the earth of a Savior. God's answer to sin was to be a Savior, since humans were powerless before sin and Satan. In order to defeat the designs of the devil, God must introduce a Hero Who could rescue and redeem. People could never find a way to redeem themselves. We could not educate ourselves well enough. We could not invent enough technology. We could not civilize ourselves enough to undo what Satan had so cleverly engineered in Eden.

But Satan had another plan, one to respond to the prophecy of God in Genesis 3:15. This Savior would come through the line of the woman. Satan's hope of thwarting God's plan would be to destroy the lineage of the woman. Cain, Adam's ungodly son, had murdered Abel, the godly son. The Savior could not come through the lineage of Cain.

God answered that crisis by blessing Adam and Eve with another son, one who would perpetuate the godly line. We read of him in Genesis 4:25-26. His name was Seth about whom we read, *"And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: for God, said she, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew. And to Seth, to him also there was born a son: and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the* LORD." Thus the line through which the Savior could come was rescued and preserved.

That is the lesson of theology. But there are practical lessons here for parents and churches. Parents, your example is of tremendous importance. Your children are going to tend to become what you are, to follow your example. Parents, there are forces at work which are determined to undermine your influence and the influence of God in the lives of your children. One of those is none other than Satan and all of his minions. Parents, nothing will take the place of the Word, the faith, and the church in the lives of your children. Parents, what you do now will establish a pattern which may be perpetuated for generations to come in your family. Our obligations go beyond the immediate and the present. Our obligations flow out to generations yet unborn. We bare a solemn responsibility. Let us then take hold of Jesus by faith to perpetuate the lessons of faith in our families for succeeding generations. AMEN!

LESSON 7

# Angels and the Flood

## Genesis 6:1-7

When we were children, we accepted the Bible story of the Flood without hesitation. We did not understand many things about the Flood. We did not understand much of what motivated God to do what He did. And no one had yet cast doubts on this story. While we remain firm in our faith in spite of the doubts and questions raised by modern skeptics, still there is mystery here in abundance.

This lesson does not seek to prove by geology and archaeology that the flood actually occurred. The accuracy of the story is a matter of faith. We are not focusing on the types, the illustrations of our Lord which are presented by the ark, the vehicle of salvation for Noah and his family. Instead this lesson is focused on what motivated God to do what He did in Genesis 6. And in looking at that issue, we may be looking squarely at the most mysterious aspect of this entire event.

## Looking Back

The previous lesson examined the results of the fall of mankind in Eden and how that single event has colored all of human history. We looked at the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, the angels

### The Heart of the Lesson

The conflict between God and Satan is real and terrible in its scope. Seek a growing relationship with God through Christ for power against spiritual wickedness.

that closed the garden with a flaming sword, and the first of the Messianic prophecies from Genesis 3:15. It is important because it was addressed in part to Satan, who engineered the fall of man. *"And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: and I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel."*

Genesis 3:15 spoke of the seed of Satan and the seed of the woman. The seed of Satan was an ungodly line within the human family that willingly embraced the will and the ways of Satan. The seed of the woman referred to a godly line within the human family that willingly embraced the will and purposes of God.

It is clear that Satan grasped the full meaning of this prophecy and set about to undermine and ruin what God had decreed. In order to ruin this first Messianic prophecy, Satan attempted to destroy the seed of the woman leaving only his seed on the earth. When Adam and Eve became parents to Cain and Abel, Satan inspired Cain to murder his brother.

Cain was the seed of Satan by his rejection of the word of God and his rebelliousness. Abel was a member of the godly line who was determined to obey God and His word. When Abel was murdered this left only Cain and his offspring, the ungodly line.

But God blessed Adam and Eve again with the birth of another son, Seth. Eve said of this son, *"For God ... hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew"* (Genesis 4:25). Then the Bible adds, *"And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the LORD"* (Genesis 4:26). In other words, the godly line had been rescued and God's prophecy in Genesis 3:15 was perpetuated.

## The Flood

If we understand Satan's desire to destroy the seed of the woman through which the Messiah would come, then Genesis 6:1-2 begins to take on more meaning. *"And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose."*

There has been considerable difference of opinion among Bible scholars in respect to the identity of the sons of God. The view which has had the widest acceptance is that these marriages between the sons of God and the daughters of men refer to unions between believers and unbelievers. It is supposed that the sons of God were the

descendants of Seth, while the daughters of men are regarded as the offspring of Cain, and that these two lines gradually united until the line of distinction between God's people and the world was lost. It is further concluded that the Flood was God's judgment resulting from the failure of God's people to maintain their place of separation in the world. That is the usual and most often espoused interpretation.

But there are four questions which arise as a result of this interpretation. First, if the sons of God are the descendants of Seth, the godly line, and the daughters of men are the offspring of Cain, the ungodly line, then it means that all of God's people were men, while all the women were unbelievers which isn't reasonable. Second, if the *"sons of God"* were believers, then they perished in the Flood. But 2 Peter 2:5 says, *"Bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly."* Third, there is no record in the book of Genesis that God had forbidden His people from marrying unbelievers. That comes later. In all ages there have been some of God's people who have married unbelievers and were *"unequally yoked"* (2 Corinthians 6:14). In many cases they suffered, but they were not destroyed by a great flood or some other catastrophe. Fourth, we cannot help but wonder why the union of believers with unbelievers should result in the birth of *"giants."* Genesis 6:4 says that as a result of the union between the sons of God and the daughters of men, *"there were giants in the earth in those days."*

If the words, *"the sons of God"* do not refer to the saints of that age, then to whom do they refer? In Job 1:6; 2:1; and 38:7 the same expression is found. For instance in Job 1:6 we read, *"Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them."* The reference there is to angels, Satan being one of them. The same is true in Job 2:1 and 38:7. If in fact this term refers to angels (in this case fallen angels) and not men, then we have an even more sinister plot on the part of the devil to destroy the line through which Jesus would come.

Angels were mistaken for men on several occasions in the Bible. The angels who removed Lot from Sodom were mistaken for men. Those same angels appeared to Abraham and Sarah only shortly before that event in the form of men. At the grave of Jesus those who entered the empty tomb were greeted by an angel in the form of a man. We are told to be careful to entertain strangers for some have entertained angels unawares (Hebrews 13:2).

There are two possible things that could have transpired here. One, fallen angels took possession of the bodies of men, and these possessed creatures produced offspring with the daughters of men. Or it was simply fallen angels who assumed the forms of men who produced offspring with the daughters of men.

The first assumption is not really credible in light of Jude 6 which

speaks with a great deal of mystery, *"And the angels which kept not their first estate* [from *arche*, or what they were intended to be] *but left their own habitation* [from *oikos* or house], *he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."*

This verse refers to fallen angels who committed such an egregious act that God did not wait to the end of time to exact His judgment upon them. Instead He cast them into hell reserving them in chains until the final judgment. This judgment is different from what was done with other fallen angels that were allowed to remain free, accounting for the cases of demon possession found in the Gospels.

The resulting offspring of these demonic unions is described in this way, *"There were giants in the earth in those days."* The Hebrew word for *giants (nephilim)* means "fallen ones."

A further description is found in Genesis 6:4 where these offspring were called *"men of renown"* (men of extraordinary abilities and powers). A plain interpretation might suggest that the offspring born of these illicit unions were more like devils than men. They were a threat to the lineage through which the Messiah would come.

## The Conclusions

These are the two interpretations regarding the mysteries of Genesis 6:2-4. None of us can be absolutely sure which interpretation is correct. However the contemplation of these interpretations is another reminder of the great spiritual warfare that has been ongoing between God and Satan through the ages. Paul warned us that the battle we wage is not against *"flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places"* (Ephesians 6:12).

As we examine this part of the record of the Flood we ought to learn the following lessons.

We can't live a victorious life in the strength of our own power and abilities. The opposition is too powerful.

We must develop a fervent and consistent prayer life through which we tap the resources of the Almighty.

We must not grow arrogant because there are powers all around us before which we are no match.

We must remember that *"greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world"* (1 John 4:4). The more spiritual we become, the more we realize our weakness and the more we rely on His strength.

LESSON 8

# Angels and God's Law

## Deuteronomy 33:1-3

In the Middle Ages, the ideals of knighthood were well established. True nobility demanded a commitment to justice as a remedy for the evil of the times. In medieval thought, the ideal of knighthood could be traced back to angels. The biography of Boucicaut, one of the purest representatives of knighthood, proclaimed that the archangel Michael's feat of casting Satan from heaven was the "first deed of knighthood and chivalrous prowess that was ever achieved." The medieval knight who rescued maidens from distress and fought evil to ensure social tranquility was motivated by angels as they discharged their duty to God. The rules and obligations of knighthood were largely drawn from the image of angels acting as guardians over the saints.

## Angels and the Law of God

The giving of the Law on Mount Sinai was a monumental moment. Try to imagine this scene: *"And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that was in the camp trembled.... And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the* LORD *descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the*

### The Heart of the Lesson

The law of God was given to serve as a spiritual and moral compass. Embrace God's law as a guidepost for daily living.

*whole mount quaked greatly. And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice"* (Exodus 19:16-19).

As we think about the magnificent sights and sounds of that occasion, we should recognize that angels were present in massive numbers. *"The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them"* (Deuteronomy 33:2). Notice the reference to the saints in that verse? The Hebrew term means "holy ones." The reference is clearly identifying angels and not men.

Another reference to the presence of the angels at Sinai is found in Psalm 68. *"O God, when thou wentest forth before thy people, when thou didst march through the wilderness; Selah: The earth shook, the heavens also dropped at the presence of God: even Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God, the God of Israel.... The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.... The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place"* (verses 7-8, 11, 17).

Acts 7 gives us an indication that angels participated in the giving of God's law. *"This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sina, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us"* (verses 37-38). The *lively oracles* refers to the Law. Notice the specific reference to an angel that spoke to him in the mount. The word is not capitalized which indicates that the translators understood this individual to be an angel, not the Angel of the Lord, a way that Jesus was often identified in the Old Testament.

Stephen continued, *"Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? And they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers: who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it"* (verses 51-53). The phrase, *"disposition of angels,"* has reference to the direction and administration of the angels.

Paul makes reference to the same phenomenon. *"Wherefore then serveth the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator"* (Galatians 3:19). This often misunderstood verse says simply that the Law was put into effect by angels at the direction of a mediator, Christ Jesus. While it is impossible for us to know all of the details of the involvement of angels with the Law, it is clear that they had a very real role in the administration of the Law.

Hebrews 2:1-3 adds to our knowledge about angels and the Law. *"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward; how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him."*

The Law which was given on Sinai was binding. It not only exposed the transgressions of men, but it also exposed the sinner to judgment! The angels who gathered around to observe the events at Sinai, the angels who served God in the communication of the Law to Moses, those same angels also administered justice to those who broke the Law!

That is why those knights of the Middle Ages made the association between Michael and the responsibilities of their knighthood. The true knight was so committed to justice that he was obligated to punish the wicked. Angels as God's agents enforce God's Law, and often are a terror to lawbreakers.

## Agents of Justice

In Psalm 35 David pleads with the Lord to fight against those who fought against him. Since David was God's anointed ruler, rebellion against David was rebellion against God's will. David had a right to expect divine intervention. He prayed, *"Let them be as chaff before the wind: and let the angel of the LORD chase them. Let their way be dark and slippery: and let the angel of the LORD persecute them"* (verses 5-6).

In a Psalm of Asaph, the writer talks about the bondage of Israel in Egypt and the plagues that God used to free Israel from bondage. *"How he had wrought his signs in Egypt, and his wonders in the field of Zoan: and had turned their rivers into blood; and their floods, that they could not drink. He sent divers sorts of flies among them, which devoured them; and frogs, which destroyed them.... He cast upon them the fierceness of his anger, wrath, and indignation, and trouble, by sending evil angels among them"* (Psalm 78:43-49).

In the Old Testament we see angels involved in enforcing God's law by administering judgment upon lawbreakers many times. In Genesis 19 angels participated in bringing judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah. In Exodus 7-11 angels acted as agents directing the plagues upon Egypt. In 1 Chronicles 21, 70,000 Jews were killed in a plague before David confessed his sin of numbering the people to satisfy his pride. A mighty angel was about to destroy Jerusalem, but God stayed the hand of the avenging spirit. In 2 Kings 19 an angel destroyed 185,000 Assyrians who had invaded Israel.

## Justice in the New Testament

We have a number of examples in the New Testament just as we do in the Old Testament of angels acting as agents of justice. One of the most dramatic is found in Acts 12. *"Immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost"* (Acts 12:23).

But that is just a precursor to what we read in the rest of the New Testament. *"To you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thessalonians 1:7-8).

The Revelation in dramatic and horrific fashion describes the work of God's angels acting as the administrators of God's justice. *"The angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth; and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound"* (Revelation 8:5-6).

The angels will separate the wicked from the just in the last day. *"The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity"* (Matthew 13:41).

This explains one of the more mysterious passages in the Bible. Luke 12:8-9: *"Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God. But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God."*

Let's draw some conclusions. Angels know us. We are never out of their sight, nor out of their reach. Angels know all of us by our faith or lack of faith in the saving grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Angels are the guardians of the saved and the protectors of the righteous. Angels will lay hands on us at our deaths. Some will be escorted into God's heaven. Others will be cast into hell. Those are strong hands which we cannot escape. They are administrators of God's grace on the one hand, and God's justice on the other.

While we are not to worship these amazing agents sent from heaven, we can rejoice to know that God employs them to work on our behalf. The reality of their presence and work should increase our faith. Their work in the administration of God's purposes will one day vindicate the faith that we have in God. That is hallelujah ground for every believer.

LESSON 9

# Angels and the Tower of Babel

## Genesis 10:8-10; 11:1-9

On March 19, 2003, American forces fired the first shots into Baghdad in a move to remove Saddam Hussein from power and liberate the nation of Iraq. Saddam Hussein was overthrown, later arrested, and executed on December 30, 2006. Iraq has a long history of strife, turmoil, and war. We should always remember that this part of the world is literally the cradle of humanity. The Garden of Eden was there. The scene of most of the early biblical stories were centered in the southern part of Iraq close to the Tigris and Euphrates rivers.

*"Now these are the generations of the sons of Noah, Shem, Ham, and Japheth: and unto them were sons born after the flood"* (Genesis 10:1). The chapter is a family tree. Every person on earth today can trace his own family history back to one of the three sons of Noah. These genealogies which are so carefully recorded in the Bible are important primarily because of the words of God to Satan in Genesis 3:15.

By the time we come to Genesis 10, the confrontation between God and Satan had been in full swing for a long time. When cast from heaven he fell to the earth where, as many scholars suggest, he wrought havoc upon the earth marring it dramatically. By his temptation of Adam and Eve, he successfully engineered the fall in Eden

**The Heart of the Lesson**

Satan is the great imitator of God. We must be wise to the wiles of the devil through the study of Scripture and the understanding of God's purposes.

causing God to issue the prophecies of Genesis 3 and bringing a curse with major ramifications upon mankind. Those curses still plague all of humanity to this very day. Then as Genesis 6 details, Satan sought to corrupt and destroy the seed of the woman through which the promised Messiah would come. Whether by a breed of fallen angels or by a generation of unusually wicked men offspring from the *"daughters of men"* produced a breed of people described as *"giants in the earth"* and *"men of renown"* whose every thought was on *"only evil continually"* (Genesis 6:4-5). Beneath the surface of this story there was at work the sinister inspiration of Satan and his legions of demons doing their best to thwart the purposes of God. The results precipitated the Flood which God used to destroy that generation of people that had become over time more devil than human. But Satan was not through with his evil designs.

## The First Antichrist

Having preserved the family of Noah, the seed of the woman was preserved. But this fallen angel is tenacious and determined. When we come to Genesis 10, the population of that region of the world had largely been replenished. In typical fashion the descendants of Noah drifted further and further away from the Lord. This fact gave Satan another opportunity to undermine the will of God.

Remember that Genesis 3:15 tells us that God would provide a Messiah and Savior for all who would believe. If God would do that, then Satan determined to introduce an antichrist. Genesis 10 and 11 was his first attempt to interject an antichrist into the world. The record of that attempt is almost buried within this genealogy of the sons of Noah and their offspring. Please remember that Satan has not only been the avowed and age-long enemy of God, but he has also been an imitator of what God has done. He has repeatedly counterfeited what God does in the world.

If all of God's purposes for mankind are to be realized and consummated in Christ, then it is logical that Satan will attempt to counterfeit what God has done. Satan's designs will also be headed up in a man, called the *"man of sin"* (2 Thessalonians 2:3-4) who will for a short season reign over the earth as its king during the tribulation. This person will be energized by Satan (2 Thessalonians 2:9-10). When this ultimate antichrist arises, he will become the world's ultimate dictator (Revelation 13:16).

John said the world has seen many lesser antichrists, no less energized by Satan, who were raised up in opposition to the purposes of God. Such was the case in Genesis 10-11 where we are introduced to the world's first antichrist. His name was Nimrod and he is introduced to us as an important interruption in the genealogy of Genesis

10. *"And Cush* [a son of Ham] *begat Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar"* (verses 8-10).

Nimrod's father was a son of Ham upon whom God cursed for his intemperate designs upon his own father, Noah. It was said that he *"saw the nakedness of his father"* (Genesis 9:22). There is a debate about the meaning of that phrase. Most probably Ham had homosexual designs toward his own father which explains the terrible curse placed upon him.

Nimrod was situated in a place called the *"land of Shinar."* That place is the ancient name for what we know as Iraq. The particular site in Shinar which was associated with Nimrod was Babel, or Babylon as we would know it. The river Euphrates, which we have heard so much about in the news, ran right through the middle of Babylon in the time of Nebuchadnezzar. Interestingly the Republican guard unit which protected Hussein in Iraq was known as the Nebuchadnezzar Division.

We should be aware that there are many comparisons which can be drawn between Nimrod and the final antichrist about which we read in the New Testament. His name means "rebel." In 2 Thessalonians 2:8 Paul describes the antichrist as Wicked. He is lawless or a rebel. Nimrod led a rebellion and organized a confederacy in open revolt against God. The building of the Tower of Babel was a means of revolt against God. Further, Genesis 10:9 calls Nimrod, *"the mighty hunter before the LORD."* The word *before* indicates "in opposition to" not "in the presence of." About the ultimate antichrist we read, *"And the king shall do according to his will; and he shall exalt himself, and magnify himself above every god* [ruler], *and shall speak marvellous things against the God of gods, and shall prosper till the indignation be accomplished: for that that is determined shall be done. Neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor the desire of women, nor regard any god: for he shall magnify himself above all"* (Daniel 11:36-37).

Four times the word *mighty* is used to describe Nimrod. Of the antichrist we read: *"Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders"* (2 Thessalonians 2:9).

Nimrod was a *"mighty hunter before the LORD."* That phrase refers to a hunter of men, not game. Psalm 5:6 speaks of the antichrist as, *"the bloody and deceitful man"* as if murder and pillage are synonymous with this individual. He will rule by fear as did Nimrod.

Nimrod's headquarters were in Babylon. In Isaiah 14:4 the antichrist is called *"the king of Babylon."* In the Revelation he is associ-

ated with what is called *"MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT"* (Revelation 17:3-5).

Finally, Nimrod's primary desire was to make a name for himself. Genesis 11:4 speaks of Nimrod's motivation for building the tower of Babel: *"And they said, Go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."* The antichrist will be motivated by a desire to exalt himself *"above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God"* (2 Thessalonians 2:4).

## The World's First Dictator

Nimrod is not mentioned at all in Genesis 11, but from the statements made in chapter 10 we can assume that he organized the rebellion against God which is described in chapter 11. *"And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth"* (11:4). That was a blatant defiance of God, a refusal to obey His commands given to Noah: *"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"* (Genesis 9:1). But Nimrod and his minions said: *"Let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth."*

Nimrod's ambition was to establish a world empire. If in fact he could accomplish this purpose, Satan would be able to control the whole world through his disciple, Nimrod.

We have been watching a great conflict in that same part of the world. Saddam Hussein was just another in a long line of Nimrods who have risen to temporary power in that part of the world. Hussein said that he was the reincarnation of Nebuchadnezzar, the most famous of all of Babylon's rulers about whom we read so much in Daniel. Each wanted to build an empire. Each wanted to extend his empire to the ends of the earth. Hussein was no different.

The struggles and conflict we have witnessed in the Middle East are an ongoing part of the spiritual warfare between God and Satan. Each tyrant from Nimrod to Hussein was energized by Satan. They were clearly precursors to the ultimate antichrist. God confronted each of them for they were hindrances to His purposes.

LESSON 10

# Getting Acquainted With Our Guardian Angels

## Genesis 32:1-2; Hebrews 1:13-14

Twenty years before this text from Genesis, Jacob had left his father's home in Beersheba armed with a promise from God that he received on the first night following his departure. *"Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of"* (Genesis 28:15).

The experience recorded in the first two verses of this chapter came at the time of another crisis in the life of Jacob. He had, after twenty years, left the home of Laban, his uncharitable father-in-law, to return to his home in Palestine. His path was leading him close to the home of his brother Esau. Jacob had left home originally to flee the wrath of Esau. Jacob had stolen the family birthright. As a result, his brother had been offended and had murder, the murder of Jacob, on his mind.

Jacob was no soldier. Traveling along with his defenseless caravan streaming behind him, all at once a brightly arrayed army of angels

**The Heart of the Lesson**

Angels travel with us down the ordinary paths of life. In confidence let us live our lives dedicated to fulfilling God's plan and purpose for each and every life.

met him. Whether visible to the physical eye, or to the eye of faith, they were visible to this troubled man. In confident joy he called the name of the place *Mahanaim*, which means, "two hosts." The two hosts indicate that the angelic band was both in front of Jacob and behind him, surrounding him with protection, making him invincible to any natural force which might be arrayed against him.

This army of angels was Jacob's guardian angels. From Hebrews 1:13-14 we learn that you and I have guardian angels watching over us.

## God's Servants Are on Our Side

The Bible says simply, *"His camp is very great"* (Joel 2:11), and all the hosts in his camp are our allies. Some of those in his camp are visible agents. Many more are invisible, but are real and powerful. The greatest part of the army of the Lord consists of unseen angels whose presence is not discernible except by the eye of faith.

Jacob's case was very unusual. Jacob actually saw two squadrons of these invisible forces. We are told, *"And Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him. And when Jacob saw them, he said, This is God's host: and he called the name of that place Mahanaim* [place of two camps]" (Genesis 32:1-2).

This passage and Hebrews 1 teaches us that a guard of angels always surrounds every believer. Ministering spirits are always present, protecting the princes of the royal blood of Jesus. They cannot be discerned by any of our senses, but they are perceptible by faith, and on occasion they have been made visible to men for very special purposes.

These bands of angels are great in their numbers. We read in the Bible of an *"innumerable company of angels"* (Hebrews 12:22). God has enough of them at his disposal to take care of you and all those that you love. And of course these special servants of God are all equipped with amazing power. None of the angels of God is known to faint before any adversary.

All of these angelic agents work in order and by divine design. It is God's host. All of the forces of nature are loyal to God, and especially the angelic hosts. Never forget that God has a plan for us. In addition God has the means and the forces capable to implement His plan. God's host of angels is always obedient to divine commands. Jacob went on his way, *"and the angels of God met him"* (Genesis 32:1) and this was by God's design.

The forces of God were engaged personally to attend to the needs of Jacob. Jacob was a saint, but not a perfect one. We cannot help but see his many flaws. Yet the angels of God met him. Therefore I learn, that sinner though I am, if I am numbered among the saints

of God by my faith in Christ, God employs these wonderful creatures to guard, guide, and protect me. This heavenly escort through life is not just for the best of the best. Ordinary and sometimes flawed believers can count upon the guardianship of God by his angelic host.

## Angels Travel With Us Down the Ordinary Paths of Life

Jacob was traveling an ordinary road when this vision occurred. Here is a man who has not ventured forth on some grand and holy conquest to confront an enemy as had his grandfather Abraham. Here is a man who is not setting forth on some missionary adventure. Here is a man who is simply going home after a long absence. We are to learn that we are most apt to need and receive God's protection as we travel those usual paths of ordinary life.

Alexander MacLaren once said, "If the week be empty of angels, you will never catch sight of a feather of their wings on Sunday." Our text reads, *"Jacob went on his way, and the angels of God met him."* This truth is illustrated over and over through the pages of the Bible.

It was so with Moses for an angel met him on the trail of ordinary toil (Exodus 3:1-2). It was the same with Gideon, the timid hero of the book of Judges (Judges 6:11). The angel of the Lord visited Joseph, Mary's husband, in his sleep. Nothing is more ordinary than sleep (Matthew 1:20). The angels came for the beggar Lazarus in death, which is common to all.

This reality means much to us. When we go to work, we want God's angels to travel with us. When we perform those ordinary tasks of daily living, we want His angels there. If we were in school, we would want them with us in the class room. If we were athletes we would want His angels on the field by our side.

We would want His angels near for we know all too well the dangers that lie hidden on the ordinary paths of life. We would want His angels near for we have families that we love. We feel a need to commit them into the care and keeping of God's angels for we have not the power to protect them from every danger that might confront them. We want His angels near for we are members of churches which need protection from those with greater powers. But we have assurance in this text that in the ordinary affairs of life, God's angels are there for all of us.

Jacob found the angels on a dusty trail of God's choosing, for the Lord had said, *"Return unto the land of thy fathers, and to thy kindred; and I will be with thee"* (Genesis 31:3). If we are walking a path of God's choosing then His angels will be hovering nearby.

## God's Angels Meet Us in the Hour of Our Need

The angels appeared to Jacob as he came upon the borders of Esau's country and then vanished when the relationship between the brothers had been restored. So often, God's help comes no sooner and no later than we really need that help. In our human weakness we will imagine that God does not care when He waits so long to come to our rescue. But Scripture teaches that God's delays are merciful. They help us to feel our need before the Lord. They throw us more completely into His arms.

Peter was left in prison even though the church was faithfully praying for his release. Prayer almost seemed fruitless. The night came and prayer was offered without interruption, but heaven seems deaf. Peter would die with the light of day, and his case appeared hopeless. But then in the last watch of the night when the day was almost dawning, an angel appeared to lead him to safety.

As Jacob we are walking the dusty trails of ordinary life. We live in a real, harsh, and dangerous world full of sin and suffering. We will not escape trouble and trial. But for the people of God the promises remain. In the midst of the troubles of life, God's angels will help us. Even in the moment of death, His angels will come for us.

## God's Angels Come to Us in a Form That We Need

Jacob needed protection so the angels came arrayed as an army ready for combat. When the women came to the tomb of Jesus, the angel appeared to them in the form of a comforter. Their hearts were broken and they needed someone to speak peace to their souls.

When Isaiah bowed in the temple after the death of his cousin, Uzziah, the angels of God appeared as Cherubim to teach him that God's providence and purpose were still intact. To the prophet it seemed that the world was out of control, his nation was in trouble, and that life had taken a terrible turn. But God reassured His weeping prophet with the vision of the angels.

The angels came to Jacob in his time of need, and he called the place Mahanaim. Again we have focused upon the Lord's hosts, His mighty angels. Infinitely more important is the Lord of those hosts, for our confidence is not in angels, but our great confidence is in our Lord. We are part of the plans and purposes of God. God has a plan and purpose for your life. The involvement of angels in the affairs of men is a further testimony to the determination of God to carry His plans and purposes to completion.

LESSON 11

# Touched by a Fallen Angel

## Genesis 3:1-8

The first three chapters of Genesis open to our consideration some of the most basic questions of our existence and experience as human beings.

Where do we come from?
How are we different from other creatures on this planet?
How are we related to our Creator?
How do we explain the presence of evil?
What is beyond this life?

## The First Home

The first chapter of Genesis depicts God creating our universe. With a burst of unimaginable power He spread a physical universe across a vast expanse of emptiness. With loving care God put each solar system and each planet in its place. Then with intricate skill He focused His attention on a single planet. Step by step God shaped the earth to be inhabited by humans. He formed the seas, the landmasses, and filled them with all kinds of life. And then God announced, *"It is good."*

But then God moved a step further. He conceived of another kind of life, a life created in His express image. It would be a man. Then declaring that it was not good for a man to be alone, He created

### The Heart of the Lesson

God created humans to live in fellowship with their Creator. Receive the Savior by faith in order to establish a relationship with the Creator.

man's counterpart, a woman. These were the parents of the human family. They were created to be special and to have a special, unique relationship to God.

These two were placed in a perfect environment. We know it as Eden. Life in this paradise at first enriched the link between God and man. There Adam and Eve lived in uninterrupted splendor. They enjoyed food in abundance, and an environment which was always comfortable. They lived in happiness and innocence in the presence of God.

## One Rule

This pair had but one restriction. There was a tree in the middle of the garden from which they were not to eat fruit. It was called the *"tree of the knowledge of good and evil"* (Genesis 2:17).

Often the question has been asked, "If God can do anything, then why did He create angels to be His servants?" We can ask the same about Adam and Eve. The answer is found in God's own explanation: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.... So God created man in his own image"* (Genesis 1:26-27).

Two Hebrew words in those verses are important. The word for *image* is *selem*. The word for *likeness* is *demut*. Both of those words in the Hebrew language are used to refer to similarities in character and personality rather than similarities in appearance. So we could read these verses as "Let us create man to have our own character, and with our own personality." The qualities that separate humans from every other creature on earth are character and personality.

Now angels and people share some things in common. One of the most important is *personality*. God created both with the ability to relate to Him in a way that other creatures could not. Angels and humans have the capacity, as does God Himself, to make moral choices. To truly be persons, with a personality that can identify with God, neither humans nor angels must be puppets. That is why the forbidden fruit was such an important part of Eden.

There is a sense in which angels and humans were both created to be the servants of God. But God created people and angels to be more than just servants. They were to be the *"sons of God"* who could relate to Him through a personality similar to the one God possesses. That's why God is so offended when people live out of fellowship with Him. They have forsaken the very purpose for which they were created.

## An Interloper Identified

It is at this point that the Bible introduces us to the most sinister and destructive personality ever created. He is an angel. But no

man in his right mind would want to be touched by this angel. He is a master of disguises and presents himself in many forms. His disguises and names are legion (Satan, devil, dragon, Abaddon, Apollyon), but he is the same sinister interloper. The word *interloper* refers to someone who interferes in the affairs of others; someone who wants to come between two individuals. In this case he arrives on the scene in an effort to sever the relationship between God and His human creation.

Now if we want to know who Satan is and why he slips into Eden to confront Eve and then Adam, the answers are found in two dramatic passages of prophecy in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. Before we look at these passages, we need to understand a basic principle of biblical prophecy. In both passages the prophets were addressing a contemporary ruler who was alive and functioning at the time these passages were written. But suddenly and strangely the prophets shift their focus away from that person to focus on a shadowy figure that stands behind, influences, and motivates the human ruler.

In Ezekiel 28 the prophet at first addresses the prince of Tyrus. Tyre was a wealthy city-state on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea. This ruler's palace and citadel was constructed on an island just off the coast of Lebanon. His island citadel was considered impregnable. It could only be reached by ship. But it was protected by the world's greatest navy.

The prince of Tyre felt so secure in his island fortress that his ego and pride knew no bounds. After a time inflated by his evil success at conquest, he began to think of himself as a god. As Ezekiel was pronouncing God's judgment on this man, he saw through a spiritual haze another figure, a spiritual figure that stood behind the king of Tyre motivating his boundless wickedness. To Ezekiel you could not separate the king of Tyre from this spiritual being who moved and inspired him. And Ezekiel knew that this spiritual personality was far more dangerous than the king of Tyre, who was just a man. Ezekiel knew exactly who he was, this spiritual figure of wickedness and deception. *"Thou hast been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was thy covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of thy tabrets and of thy pipes was prepared in thee in the day that thou wast created"* (Ezekiel 28:13).

Ezekiel continues: *"Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth; and I have set thee so: thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. Thou wast perfect in thy ways from the day that thou wast created."* If Ezekiel had stopped there, we would have had a description of the most amazing creature that God ever created. He was a part of that spiritual world of angels, sitting at the very pinnacle of hierarchy in the angelic world.

In the angelic world, no other angel was so beautiful, so powerful, or so talented. Yet Ezekiel did not stop there. He went on and added this sad word, *"Till iniquity was found in thee"* (Ezekiel 28:13-14).

Still Ezekiel was not done. *"By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire. Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou has corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness: I will cast thee to the ground, I will lay thee before kings, that they may behold thee"* (Ezekiel 28:16-17).

Isaiah saw this very same spiritual figure and wondered, *"How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High. Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell, to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man* [the creature] *that made the earth to tremble, that did shake kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof; that opened not the house of his prisoners?"* (Isaiah 14:12-17).

Adam and Eve were touched by an angel in the Garden of Eden. But that touch resulted in their fall spiritually. And it led to their removal from Eden. All of the curses of human life which afflict us still were born in that terrible scene so long ago.

God could have done with humanity what he did with fallen angels. When Lucifer and the angels who followed him fell, God cast them aside and made no provision for their redemption. When the angels fell, there was no opportunity for salvation or redemption.

But God in His unique love for those who were created a little lower than the angels, made a provision for our redemption in the form of Christ's death on the cross. How important are you to God? How valuable are you to Him? Jesus did not die for even a single fallen angel. But for you and me He gave Himself to all the terrors of the cross. You are more wonderful and more valuable to God than any angel. Will you then reject so great a salvation that was not even offered to a single fallen angel?

LESSON 12

# Angels and the Church

## Ephesians 3:7-15

The church is the Lord's only institution in this age. The existence of local churches has been a part of the purpose of God from the beginning. It should not surprise us that the angels have a unique relationship with the church. The church is an institution where bond and free, male and female, Jew and Gentile all come together under the umbrella of faith in Christ. Paul discusses this mystery in Ephesians 3:1-9.

In verses 10 and 11 we find an unusual exclamation. *"To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."* The Greek word for *manifold* is *polupoikilos.* It literally means, "many-varied or many-faceted." Truly the wisdom of God is manifold, multifaceted, and multicolored. In the Lord's churches this wisdom is put on display for the benefit of *"the principalities and powers in heavenly places"* (verse 10). Paul is saying that in the churches the angels witness and learn about the manifold wisdom of God.

## Angels in Church

It is an astonishing thing to ponder that God's angels are taught about the wisdom of God in churches. Think of their exalted posi-

### The Heart of the Lesson

Angels are faithful to attend church with us. Let our conduct and attitude reflect that we are encompassed by a great cloud of witnesses that includes God's holy and faithful angels.

tion. They have looked with an unblinking eye upon the glory of the Almighty. Yet they visit churches like school boys in a quest for knowledge about the wisdom of the One that they serve day and night.

Through the ages they have watched and even participated in the providence of God. Yet in watching the providence of God at work in human history they had not learned enough for 1 Peter 1:12 speaks of *"things the angels desire to look into."* What other things, considering their history, could the holy angels of God desire to look into and understand? What part of the manifold wisdom of God did they need additional education?

## Angels and Salvation

It must be an astonishing thing to angels to learn and see how God saves fallen humans. For one thing they must wonder how God can be just and yet find a way to justify the ungodly. They recognize more clearly than any of us that holiness is the scepter He holds in His hand. They understand that righteous is the crown that adorns His head. These are attributes of His own personality that God jealously guards and defends. Who knows this better than the angels who serve Him?

God's justice was put on display repeatedly in the Old Testament. In particular we see His justice on display when the Jews in disobedience refused to follow God's bidding to enter the land of promise. When Samson sinned away his awesome endowments, in despair He prayed that God would let him die. And when David in honored ambition wanted to build the temple, he was denied the privilege and told that the sword would never leave his house. God's justice was on display.

But if humans were to be saved and God's crowning creation was to be preserved, something more than justice would be required. The angels watched in astonishment as Christ Jesus left the exaltation of heaven for the trials of an earthly existence. They watched in astonishment as Jesus took the sins of humanity upon Himself while suffering and dying on the cross. They watched in amazement as Jesus paid the penalty for the sin of mankind, thus satisfying the justice and holiness of God.

That which was lost in Eden in the sin of Adam was recovered in Christ. The fellowship with God that was severed by the transgression in Eden was restored at Calvary. Justice had been satisfied while mercy could be extended to all who would believe. As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all who believe yet live.

So angels attend church. When somebody walks the aisle in a public display of their acceptance of Christ, they watch. They also

must rejoice for there is still *"joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth"* (Luke 15:10). Every saved sinner teaches these marvelous creatures more about the love, mercy, and grace of God.

## Angels Watching Believers

When angels attend church they learn how the grace of God grows in the life of a believer. First Corinthians 11:10 is a difficult verse. *"For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels."* The discussion by Paul began with instructions on the standards of dress for men and women in the church. The man was to leave his head uncovered. The women were to wear their hair long to cover their heads.

In the ancient world prostitutes commonly shaved their heads to advertise the profession in which they were involved. This practice was well known to Corinthian Christians. The admonition to the women was simply a reminder that as believers they were to act and even dress differently. Grace was at work in their lives.

Dr. Vance Havner used to say, "I hear people say that it is not what you are wearing that counts but what is in your heart. But people can't see in your heart. They see what you are wearing." What is legitimately in the heart of a believer ought to be reflected in how we act and dress. Angels watch us to learn about the effects that salvation has upon the entirety of our lives.

Angels watch our actions. In fiery trials the true Christian will glorify and praise God. They are astonished at the forbearance, the patience, and the comfort that God gives us in the midst of our struggles.

They come to church for it is there that we receive so much that colors and shapes our lives. In the Sunday School and Bible classes we are exposed to the Word of God, which is the food of nourishment and growth for the believer. Our growth in grace is directly attributed to the Word of God that we take in to our minds and souls.

They hear our prayers. They know the details of those things with which we struggle. They see us when we live and move in the strength of the Spirit of God. And they see us when we falter and stumble. They see us in our victories and triumphs in the faith.

They watch us as we move through life headed to an inevitable date with death. They stand ready to come for us when we lay down this mantle of life and mortality. They are connected to us from our birth onward to our death. And they learn the lessons of the manifold wisdom of God.

LESSON 13

# Angels and the End of Time

**Revelation 4:5-11**

John was to write first about the encounter that he had with Jesus on Patmos. *"The things which thou hast seen"* are recorded in chapter 1. Then John was to write about *"the things which are."* This part of the Revelation is discovered in chapters 2 and 3 as John faithfully records our Lord's letters to the seven churches of Asia. *"The things which shall be hereafter"* are recorded in chapter 4 to the end of the book. This is prophecy of highest order.

In Revelation 4 we have an amazing description of heaven, and we are introduced to a myriad of mysterious personalities. Two of these groups are important to our study. In Revelation 4:4 we are introduced to the twenty-four elders. We conclude that these are representative of the twelve patriarchs of the Old Testament and the twelve apostles of the New Testament. They are the representatives of the saints of all the ages who are assembled in heaven. Then in verses 6-9 we meet the four beasts. Who are these creatures and what are we to learn from their presence around the throne of God?

## The Identity of the Four Beasts

In the Greek language the usual word for *beasts* is *theria*, which refers to wild animals. But that word is not used here. The word

**The Heart of the Lesson**

The world is moving rapidly toward a date with destiny, the end of time. Believers should live in confidence as the end of time approaches clinging to their faith and participating in the work of God in the earth.

used in this text is *zoa* or "living creatures." So John said literally, "In the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four living creatures."

John describes these living creatures in verse 7: the first was like a lion, the second like a calf, the third had a face as a man, and the fourth was like a flying eagle. We have seen these four living creatures before. *"Also out of the midst thereof came the likeness of four living creatures.... As for the likeness of their faces, they four had the face of a man, and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side; they four also had the face of an eagle"* (Ezekiel 1:5, 10). *"And every one had four faces: the first face was the face of a cherub, and second face was the face of a man, and the third the face of a lion, and the fourth the face of an eagle"* (Ezekiel 10:14). Then in verse 20 he gives these living creatures a title: *"This is the living creature that I saw under the God of Israel by the river of Chebar; and I knew that they were the cherubims."*

The living creatures of Revelation 4 are cherubim, which are special and unique in their nature and function. When John shares the vision of what he saw around the throne of God, he saw distinct classes of individuals: angels (Revelation 7:1), the twenty-four elders, the four beasts, and the living creatures that are distinct from the others. Whoever these creatures are, they have some things in common. They are in the same location as they move about. They all have six wings, and six is the number of man in Bible numerology. They are full of eyes *"before and behind"* signifying that nothing is withheld from their view.

## The Meaning of the Cherubim

It seems apparent that the cherubim occupy a sphere of responsibility in this world. They are four in number and four is the number for the world. The cherubim are involved in the execution of God's purposes for this world. They are seen standing on the steps of the throne of God and moving to execute God's decrees anywhere in the world. They are associated with God's judgments on an unbelieving world (Revelation 4:5; 6:1, 3-5, 7; 15:7). The seven bowls in Revelation 15:7 are the sum total of the final wrath of God against sin and unbelief.

During the dark days of the Civil War people were desperate for news. Newspapers added illustrations that put a face to the stories they published. The illustrators were talented people who drew scenes of battle and sketched the likenesses of the combatants. These beasts are illustrations. Expositors from various schools of thought have suggested an array of meanings for the beasts. Some say these beasts represent the servants of God, the chief ministers of God, the four

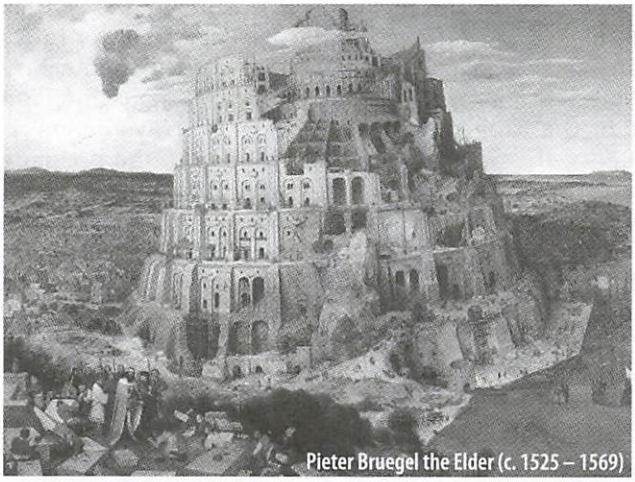
great churches of the ancient world, the four great virtues in men, the four great powers of humanity, or the four great attributes of Christ.

None of those really satisfies the record of Scripture. What do they teach us? The most logical is that these creatures are representative of the gospel of Christ. The gospel of Christ is recorded in the first four books of the New Testament. Matthew depicts Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the King of the Jews. Mark portrays Jesus as the Servant King, hence the ox or calf is a fit emblem. Luke presents Jesus as the Son of Man. John describes Him as the Son of God Who is able to look upon the glory of God. The eagle can look directly into the light of the sun and is a fit emblem for Jesus in John's Gospel.

These were the four facets of the work of Christ in the earth during the days of His ministry on the earth. He was the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Servant King, the Son of Man, and the Son of God. When we examine the cherubim as depicted in the Bible we come to understand that all of the purposes and plans of God are focused upon the life, the ministry, the death, the resurrection and the coming again of Christ.

In the end those purposes will be realized and completed as Paul writes the summation of God's will in Philippians 2:6-11: *"Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* Amen!

# Still There

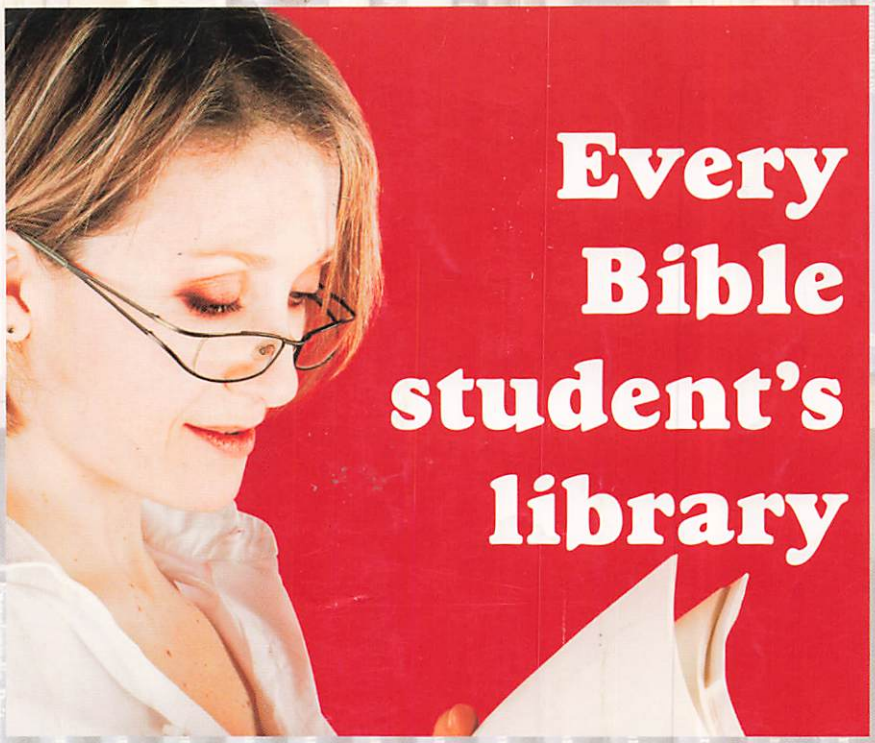

Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c. 1525 – 1569)

Our Lord declared that before He returns, lawlessness will abound and love will abate. The Revelation describes the last state of man's vaunted efforts at civilization and calls it Babylon. We apparently are still trying to build a Tower of Babel while proclaiming as they did so long ago, *"Let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name"* (Genesis 11:4). But Babylon is the biblical term for mankind's last masterpiece. It will end in total destruction and will become *"a cage of every unclean and hateful bird"* (Revelation 18:2). In other words the last chapter of man is "for the birds."

These days evidence of that is everywhere. We are living in the midst of economic collapse, political turmoil, and spiritual stagnation. Immorality abounds. We are propping ourselves up with stimulants and resting with the aid of sleeping pills. Antidepressants are the order of the day for this generation of weary and worried souls.

Things were bad in the days of the prophet Elisha. He was a hunted man, hunted for being true to God. His poor servant looked out to see the Syrians arrayed for battle encompassing the city where they were lodged. He ran to Elisha and cried out in despair, *"Alas, my master! How shall we do?"* (2 Kings 6:15). But Elisha prayed, *"LORD, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha"* (2 Kings 6:17).

We are living in bad times and hard times. But the angels are still there if we can but raise our sights. And greater still the Savior is alive and well willing to save and transform any and all who will come to Him in faith.

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